

### *Facility Would Provide Mid-Hudson Valley Vets & Military Families With Local Facility For Counseling Services*

Washington, DC - In an effort to provide veterans and military families in the mid-Hudson Valley with a convenient location for counseling and other services, Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) and Congressman John Hall (D-NY) today urged Veterans Affairs Secretary James Nicholson to establish a Vet Center in Orange County. Currently, the closest Vet Centers are in White Plains and Albany, which are inconvenient locations for many veterans and their families who live in Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Ulster, and Sullivan counties.

"These significant distances and lack of access to transportation currently stand as major obstacles for some veterans and military families, preventing them from fully utilizing available VA services to which they are entitled," Hinchey and Hall wrote to Nicholson regarding the fact that White Plains and Albany are currently the closest Vet Center locations for mid-Hudson Valley veterans. "The opening of a Vet Center in a centrally-located site in the mid-Hudson Valley would greatly benefit veterans and military families in the Hudson Valley by providing more convenient access to critical readjustment counseling and other needed services. We urge you to establish a new Vet Center to better accommodate the underserved mid-Hudson Valley counties and, furthermore, recommend that such a facility be located in Orange County due to its central location in the region."

Vet Centers provide readjustment counseling and outreach services to all veterans who served in any combat zone. Services are also available for family members of veterans and active military personnel for military related issues and readjustment counseling. The benefits are provided at no cost to the veteran or family.

"I'm hopeful that the VA will recognize that the needs of our region's veterans and their families are growing and will continue to grow for the foreseeable future," Hinchey said. "Our veterans, active service members and their families have been called upon to make tremendous sacrifices for our country. We owe it to them to ensure that they have convenient access to the full range of services that have been promised to them and which are critical in assisting many veterans and their families in transitioning back into healthy civilian lives after active combat

service."

Hall said, "Veterans from previous wars and many returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan need the support of their peers and the specialized counseling that this center would provide. A center like this for the veterans who need it in the Mid-Hudson Valley is long overdue, and I urge the Veterans Administration to put it in place as quickly as possible."

Vet Center services include individual counseling, group counseling, marital and family counseling, bereavement counseling, medical referrals, assistance in applying for VA Benefits, employment counseling, guidance and referral, alcohol/drug assessments, information and referral to community resources, military sexual trauma counseling & referral, as well as outreach and community education. The Vet Center Program was established by Congress in 1979 out of the recognition that a significant number of Vietnam era vets were still experiencing readjustment problems. Since then, Congress and the VA have extended the program to serve veterans and military families who were involved in all other conflicts, including those involved with military activity in Afghanistan and Iraq.

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The full text of the letter from Hinchey and Hall to Nicholson follows:

January 16, 2007

The Honorable R. James Nicholson, Secretary U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs 810  
Vermont Avenue NW

Washington, D.C. 20420

By Fax: (202) 273-4877

Dear Secretary Nicholson:

We are writing to request your assistance in meeting the needs of the growing number of local

veterans and military families in the Hudson Valley region of New York. Specifically, we are requesting that the Department of Veterans Affairs establish a centrally-located Vet Center to serve our constituents in the mid-Hudson Valley.

As I'm sure you're aware, Hudson Valley veterans, military personnel and their families have made and continue to make tremendous sacrifices on behalf of our country. Currently, in order to access counseling, outreach and referral services provided under the Vet Center Program, veterans and military families in the counties of Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Ulster, and Sullivan are forced to travel to Vet Centers in White Plains or Albany, both of which are considerable distances away from their communities. These significant distances and lack of access to transportation currently stand as major obstacles for some veterans and military families, preventing them from fully utilizing available VA services to which they are entitled.

The opening of a Vet Center in a centrally-located site in the mid-Hudson Valley would greatly benefit veterans and military families in the Hudson Valley by providing more convenient access to critical readjustment counseling and other needed services. We urge you to establish a new Vet Center to better accommodate the underserved mid-Hudson Valley counties and, furthermore, recommend that such a facility be located in Orange County due to its central location in the region.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and assistance on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Maurice D. Hinchey    John Hall

cc: Michael Sabo, VA Hudson Valley Health Care System